

IV

Ainsi parle la Tour CN:

Of Moose and Women ... and Talking Towers

A Female Tower: « L'Anti-Babel »

Ainsi Parle la Tour CN (2000), Hédi Bouraoui's fourth novel,¹ like *Retour à Thyna* and, in a different sense, *La Pharaone* – in which the “exotic” suddenly becomes familiar, with an effect of « déjà vu » – represents a return to other roots. Here the return is to Hédi Bouraoui's longtime home in Toronto, Canada. The novel adds to his “literature of cities”: Bangkok, Thyna/Sfax, Cairo, Toronto. Why the emphasis on cities? Because they are multicultural, diverse, and, at least in the case of Thyna/Sfax and Toronto, they are tolerant.

From the “stone lips” of the enigmatic Sphinx and the Pyramids we move to the concrete of the CN Tower, whose voice increasingly shifts in the course of the novel from « reportage », the « Babel » of modern telecommunications, to commitment, compassion, a « parti pris ». By the same token, the “phallic” tower of the opening, by taking a humanist stand,

¹ Pierre Léon calls it a « prosopopée » (8), but I prefer to think of it as a “lyric novel”.

gradually adopts a female voice in keeping with the fact that, in French, « la Tour » is grammatically gendered feminine.

A finalist for the Trillium Award 2000, *Ainsi parle la Tour CN* is both timely and uncannily prophetic, as well as disturbing. It views the CN Tower as a powerful symbol for Toronto in particular, and Canada in general. Since the CN Tower, which is personified, competes with, and at the same time seeks a dialogue with, other towers around the world, Bouraoui also offers a vision of the Global Village heralded by Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s. The Tower transmogrifies into a human being (well, almost) in the course of the novel, in which it is the principal narrator. It embodies a kind of gender-crossover, gender-bending, so it is an androgynous tower. But the Tower becomes more human, sensitive, and committed as it explores its feminine side; I will therefore refer to it as “she” hereafter.

Is she our old friend, the omniscient author, the jovial Fielding presenting his “Bill of Fare” in *Tom Jones*, or the intrusive Thackeray, the puppet-master pulling the strings of his characters in *Vanity Fair*? Bouraoui, in fact, refers negatively to the latter: « Je ne joue pas au Bon Dieu qui tire les ficelles de ses poupées » (106). Like *Vanity Fair*, it is “A Novel Without a Hero”, but it is definitely “A Novel with a Heroine”, Twylla Blue, the abandoned wife of the Mohawk Pete Deloon, a woman of the First Nations, an Amerindian mystic, and a sculptor who works in stone. It is she who imbues the CN Tower with the true spirit of Canada – not the industrious beaver, but the mysterious, formidable, courageous moose of the Northern woods, « l’Esprit-Original »². In fact, if you will, as in the previous novels, we have *two* heroines – Twylla Blue and the CN Tower, one made of stone (like the Sphinx) and the other human. At times, the two metamorphose spiritually into one. Twylla’s name, in Arabic, means « long », associating her with the tallest tower in the world, as “Blue” evokes, among other things, *Bangkok Blues*. Twylla’s global pilgrimage to the CN Tower’s rival, the Menara Tower in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, confirms the echo of the Far East, and the circling of the globe.

The other characters are defined by their relationship with the Tower, as they come and go, hide in it, seek love or lust, leap off it, plot to blow it up. Of these, the most significant are Pete Deloon and his son by Twylla, Moki, Mohawk versions of Daedalus and Icarus (especially Joyce’s), who

² Bouraoui introduced the moose in Canadian literature, giving it an important totemic, mystic role.

begin and end the novel, bringing it full circle; Souleyman Mokoko, the African engineer who operates the elevator until he is fired because of an unavoidable accident; Rocco Cacciapuoti, the ambitious Italian immigrant who becomes Minister of Communications – his responsibilities include the Tower whose principal purpose is to emit broadcast signals that cannot be blocked by the other downtown Toronto highrises (most notably the big banks) – but who yearns for his native Italy; Symphorien Lebreton, the frustrated would-be poet who conceals – or displays? – his writings in the Tower stairwells; and two secondary characters who provide comic relief – until the climax – Marc Durocher, the Québécois *de souche* and an activist for Québec separation (who beats his wife), and Marcel-Marie Duboucher, the Franco-Ontarian who feels compelled to join Marc's cause *faute de mieux* (who is gay).

Not long after the nominations for the Trillium Award were announced, the Toronto *Star*, purely coincidentally, on Saturday, April 1 – also the day of Pete Deloon's famous leap from the Tower – announced the intention of "the operators of the CN Tower" to extend its "height by at least 21.33 metres – all for the sake of the record books" (A1). The purpose is to retain Canadian "world class" superiority when the Kowloon MTR Tower is built by the Hong Kong government, which will reach a height of 574 metres (1,883 feet). The top of the CN Tower, its antenna, is 553 metres (1,815 feet). Pietre Von Jeste, speaking for the construction group hired to study the problem, says, "That 21 metres is our Everest. It's a peak we must surmount ... this thing is about a helluva lot more than just 68 feet" (A1). The Kowloon building will be both the tallest office building (rivaling Kuala Lumpur) and the tallest freestanding structure (rivaling the CN Tower) (A1, A22). Canada has three alternate plans: to "slice and stack" the Tower, slicing it just before the Sky Pod (where are you, Pete and Moki Deloon?), and then adding at least 66 concrete rings; or to use a "Pod Pump" to extend the Tower by 50 metres (possible problems with metal fatigue); or to replace the current antenna with a "sliding stick" that could be raised and lowered "much like an automobile radio antenna" (A1). The conclusion of the feasibility report confirms Bouraoui's view of Toronto: "A world-class city deserves a world-record building. And it's worth digging deep – to reach the sky" (I think Virgil said this first!) (A22).

On the same day, the *Star* published a "Letter of the Week", further supporting Bouraoui's view of the totemic value of the moose. The writer, Jane Champagne, responding to a March 17 piece in the *Star* entitled

"Hogtown, Moosetown – 400 fibreglass moose to be city's newest attraction", rebukes the *Star* for not naming "the artists involved in creating the multitude of moose destined to adorn Toronto streets". She then notes that "Charles Pachter [in illustration with moose picture] was the first Canadian artist to use the moose as a Canadian archetype in his paintings... One of his moose should have pride of place in Nathan Phillips Square..." (K7). Another artist sculpted a moose in Mayor Mel's image, CN Tower and all, and yet another "moose" appeared dressed as a Bay Street banker. Later, during the SARS scare, a pillow/mask was put over the muzzle of one of the remaining moose outside a hospital.

The Tower introduces herself arrogantly in the first sentence of the novel: « Tous les chemins mènent à moi et le ciel est ma limite », paraphrasing, "All roads lead to Rome", anticipating part of Rocco Cacciapuotì's function in the narrative, and "The sky's the limit". As the Roman Empire was, by definition, multicultural, so is Toronto, in the Indian meaning of its name, a « lieu de rencontres » (11). The Canadian debt to the First Nations is thus introduced from the very beginning, as is the Tower's even more immediate debt: « Mais qui au jour d'aujourd'hui est capable de chapeauter la plus majestueuse et la plus haute structure du monde ?... Seuls les Amérindiens ont pu me coiffer même si les hordes du monde m'ont fait surgir de ce sol qui leur appartient en première instance » (11). She stands beside Lake Ontario, and Pierre Léon reminds us that Bouraoui's lyricism is Whitmanian: it was, in fact, Whitman who celebrated "By Blue Ontario's Shore".

The Tower's movements are circular; her Revolving Restaurant turns 360 degrees in one hour, yielding views towards northern Ontario, to the South the United States, westward towards the Canadian prairies, eastward towards Québec, « la Belle Province ». There are distinct echoes of Georges Poulet's landmark text, *Les Métamorphoses du Cercle*, but perhaps more importantly in this context, of the mystic circle of the Indians, the circle of life. She herself says, « Je ressemble à cette Grande Roue du mysticisme indien. Cyclant l'Univers au cycle de la vie » (29-30).

The Tower is presented anthropomorphically. She becomes human by acquiring language. Initially, her language is transitory: « Je ne possède que la voix et l'image qui voyagent. Les nouvelles transitent en moi » (18). But she rebels against the ephemeral nature of her communication: « J'ai besoin de me détourner de ce flot incessant... Tout en évitant les longues tirades. Juste l'amour d'une ambiance créée dans le vertige des rêves. Pas celle d'un

récit traditionnel » (18). The Tower always insists she is « anti-Babel » (where multiple languages were confused, with no one's understanding). And yet, she notes, one hundred fifty-seven languages are spoken in Toronto, but communication between linguistic groups is minimal. Like Nathaniel Hawthorne's Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), she yearns for the Biblical "gift of tongues", the Pentecostal tongues that descended on the disciples after Christ's death, speaking no known language, but understood by all³. In polyglot Toronto (and the world) the Tower is « la seule structure libérée du blindage des langues » (115). The Tower's first emission concludes, « J'anti-babélise. Ma voix intérieure susurre ses frémissements avant l'aurore » (18). Lest we miss the point that this is an anti-traditional tale (as an « anti-Babel »), there is on the opening page a hidden allusion to one of the fathers of the traditional novel, Balzac: « ... je suis venue parader ma splendeur et ma laideur », the reference being to Balzac's *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*⁴. Later she compares the suicide of Pete's cousin, a mere *fait divers* in modern journalism, to the treatment Balzac, Dickens, or Manzoni would have given it: two hundred pages for motive, two hundred for plan, two hundred for execution, two hundred for consequences (77). We are looking here at a « Comédie Humaine » for the millennium.

Parallel to, and contingent upon, her discovery of language is the Tower's discovery of history. Her creation in 1975 almost coincided with Pierre Elliott Trudeau's policy of multiculturalism. For the first time in history, a country encouraged immigrants to keep their own heritages. But they ended up being ghettoized, suffered high unemployment, exclusions of all sorts, so that the idealistic concept turned to vinegar (Bouraoui Interview April 24, 2000). As Bouraoui has said, « Je pose les problèmes du Canada actuel », and « Je ne condamne pas le passé » (Bouraoui Interview April 6, 2000). But one must understand it in order to create a dialogue

³ Mohamed Chagraoui makes a similar point about the book's promotion of unity through diversity, though he does not specifically focus on the role of *linguistic* unity through diversity: « Dans *Ainsi parle la Tour CN*, l'universel repose sur la pluralité humaine ».

⁴ Georges Bélanger remarks on the difficulty of the text, caused by the deliberate fragmentation: « Et, bien que *Ainsi parle la Tour CN* soit exigeant, difficile, parce qu'entre autres, il éclate le genre (le roman), qu'il se présente sous forme d'anecdotes fragmentées... » (32).

between and among cultures. Françoise Naudillon has remarked that « Le Canada est comme un laboratoire », but we have yet to see if the experiment is a success or a failure.

The Tower wittily describes her masculine origins, but it is important to remember that the genesis of the work – the building of the Tower – lay in the masculine aspirations of the power-brokers of Toronto – phallic ambitions that the Tower herself is to modify in the course of the novel:

Tour Anglo-Saxonne, au féminin – ainsi me l'impose le français – , je me vois phallus géant, tendu, arc bandé aux pieds duquel on a eu le mauvais goût de placer un *Skydome* : vagin béant qui s'ouvre et se ferme à volonté. Sexe féminin, masculinisé par une grammaire que je ne maîtrise pas, juste pour l'amour de dénaturer nos rapports. Mais chacun tient à son sexe. (157)

The First Nations: The Delune Family

Pete De Loon: The Fall of Man

Pete's exploit begins the action of the book. He is Pierre Delune, "Moonstone" literally, and both stone – the stone of the Tower,⁵ and the mystical stones of the Indians – play a major role in the narrative, as does the moon. Twylla Blue, his wife, resembles the moon, which is associated with the triple goddess of classical mythology: Diana the Huntress, goddess of chastity, who also presides over childbirth (the association with menses), and, later, the wise old woman – in fact, the three phases of a woman's life. The Tower prefers the crescent moon to the full moon, which leads us not only to the emblem of Islam, but all the way back to the Fertile Crescent of ancient times, the cradle of civilization: « Croissant fertile irrigué par le Tigre et l'Euphrate, Croissant Rouge, autre visage d'une Croix qui soigne ceux qui y croient » (87). Pete's name is anglicized into "Deloon", the loon of the lonely Northern lakes, another animal symbol, or totem, but also, as the

⁵ Mohamed Chagraoui refers to the Tower as a philosopher's stone, « *la pierre philosophale qui les analyse avec l'objectivité du béton armé et la transparence du verre* » (16). But stone also evokes the Pyramids of the preceding novel. The referents are thus multicultural. Stone walls are also reminiscent of Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener", subtitled "A Story of Wall Street", in which Bartleby the copyist refuses to copy, and beats his head against the dead blind wall. We learn at the end that he has worked as a clerk in the Dead Letter Office of the Post Office, which has driven him to despair.

“Loonie”, symbolizing the cash nexus destroying him. Both « lune » and “loony” are associated with madness.

Pete in some ways encapsulates the language problematic posed by the Tower. As the Tower says, « Je suis de Souche et je suis fière de l'être !.. Au fait, je suis une Tour anglaise et je me narre en français. Ce n'est pas pour me vanter, mais j'aime prendre la parole de la minorité officielle » (21). Pete, like most Canadian Indians, has three names: an Indian, and those imposed by two colonizers, French and English – hence Pierre Delune becomes Pete Deloon. “Pierre” is also St. Peter, “Petros”, the rock on which Christ founded his Church. Pete’s mother, Naomi Crack, a white woman, who was not sure whether his *legal* father, or his cousin, was the biological father, abandons her son to the tender mercies of a convent school. Pete is thus trapped, biologically, culturally, religiously, and linguistically, between a white and an Indian world; between a totemic religion of nature, and an imposed Catholic faith; between French and English. His attraction to the two women, Twylla Blue and Kelly King, echoes this conflict. The Tower, by the same token, invents and speaks a “rocky language”, « une langue rocaille », in her refusal to give in to the media waves passing through her. She is herself a futuristic variation on the totem pole.

Pete’s leap from the Tower is, paradoxically, his high point in the novel, reminiscent of the leap of Robert Smith, the insurance man, from the roof of No Mercy Hospital at the beginning of Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* (1977)⁶. But Robert Smith’s, haloed by Solomon/Superman/Sugarman imagery, is a leap of despair. Pete Deloon’s is one of hope, albeit frustrated. But both Robert Smith and Pete Deloon are marginalized, a “black” man, who is one of Morrison’s Seven Days (evoking the Black Panthers), and a “red” man. The former seeks either suicide, or a flight back to Africa – the scene is deeply ambiguous; the latter seeks to espouse modern technology in order to attract a white woman, with almost equally disastrous results. Both try to be Nietzschean supermen, but cannot even emulate the comic strip Superman. As well, Morrison’s version of the flight back to Africa is that, if it is successful, the fathers leave their wives and children behind; if unsuccessful, it leads to self-destruction. Pete has left his wife and child behind, and risks self-destruction, one way or another.

⁶ Moreover, there is an important “Solomon” figure in Bouraoui’s novel, who also happens to be black: Souleyman Mokoko.

The reader is initially inclined to see Pete as the hero, but that role will pass eventually to his son Moki, who repeats, in a different vein, his father's exploit at the end of the novel, as it, like the Tower, comes full circle. In fact, Pete's leap constitutes a paradigm of the Fall of Man. It takes place, appropriately, on April 1, Poisson d'Avril in French, April Fool's Day in English. If so, Twylla Blue is a kind of new Eve, who loses her innocence through her husband's abandonment of her and his fall; but she is also a Madonna for the modern age, left with a son, Moki, a kind of new Christ, with no real father to speak of (like little Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter*) except his Heavenly Father. She is also a faithful Penelope to her far-wandering Odysseus, Pete: « Pénélope abandonnée dans la réserve, elle attend en vain le retour d'Ulysse ! » (123). It is Pete who enables the Tower to "speak", « ce premier jour du mois farceur », and Bouraoui comments wryly, « Parler et déparler, c'est la valeur vitale du pays » ["To speak or not to speak, that is the question ! »]

Far from being self-destructive (at least intentionally so), Pete's leap is in aid of life, albeit to impress a fantasy "dream girl", the Beautiful Blonde, Kelly, who directs the daily running of the Tower from her office, seated in front of a small television screen. For the Mohawk, as for the black male, the white woman might as well be wearing a sign, "Look, but don't touch"⁷. In a lovely image, we are told, « ... il rêve d'elle. Il déguste son sourire comme une orange de Floride » (16). She is as unattainable as a dream, as distant as Florida – and he is ignoring the happiness in his own backyard – Twylla.

Pete tries to use his "Indian" gifts – a head for heights, a ceremonial dance – to attract Kelly's attention. He is drawn by the « vue plongeante » (16), but also by the Beautiful Blonde, who hasn't even smiled at him on the day of his great exploit:

Le Contremaître hurle : *For God's sake Pete don't screw up this job!* À ce moment, il lui prend l'envie de danser sur le petit carré à la racine des quatre branches de l'antenne. Danse traditionnelle de Mohawk que son ami ne peut s'empêcher de photographier pour la postérité. Encouragé

⁷ Eldridge Cleaver, in *Soul on Ice*, refers to the white woman as "the Ogre" for this reason, and Ralph Ellison, in *Invisible Man*, shows the white men at the smoker using a naked blonde white girl with an American flag painted on her belly being used as an instrument of control over the young black men who are present supposedly to receive college scholarships.

par cette prise folle en image, il endosse un parachute et plonge dans ce laps de temps de l'année miracle 1975. Cascade tellement osée qu'elle surprend les amis, les travailleurs, les passants... (17-18)

Except for the Beautiful Blonde who is relieving herself in the basement washroom, instead of observing Pete's flight on her closed circuit TV screen.

From this moment on, the Tower begins to take the side of her characters: « Comment puis-je agir en sa faveur ? Moi Tour CN » (18). She adds, moreover, "I am what I tell" (97). She knows that life can't be learned, but is determined to study it nevertheless. Her wording, also, suggests that *Ainsi Parle la Tour CN* is in the great tradition of Canadian apprenticeship novels, but in this case the « apprentice » is a Tower, not a young man! Pete's Adamic fall from innocence is echoed by the Tower's, and she identifies her powerlessness to help specifically with the limits of her media-ated language. The Group of Seven, she comments, have described the Canadian landscape better than she can (89). From the time of his fall, Pete begins to deteriorate, turning increasingly to alcohol and drugs, the white man's curses imparted to the Indians, with their congenital vulnerability. He is skeptical about the whole issue of language between Québécois and Anglophones, compared to the Indians' plight (even while recognizing that it was worse, in terms of violence, in the U.S.). Language quarrels, according to him, pale beside the genocide of the Indians on the other side of the border, their de-culturation, the "planting out" of their children, the sexual abuse of children in the name of progress and the 1842 law confining the Indians to reservations, the systematic theft of their land by these so-called "founding peoples! Forget it!" (35).

We are not privileged (if that is the right word!) to witness the start of his relationship with the hitherto aloof, indifferent Kelly. Perhaps it doesn't really interest the Tower, who is not very happy with Kelly at her controls, and who comes to adore – perhaps identify with – Twylla: « Je ne vous ai pas raconté comment Kelly s'est laissée charmer par Pete » (155). If the Tower is « sans pensée », Kelly « pense mais n'existe pas » (155). The novel tends towards a complete repudiation of Cartesianism – « Je pense, donc je suis » – and a strong affirmation of existentialism – « Existence precedes essence » – which is totally alien to the computer- and law-programmed Kelly.

Pete's disillusionment is not long in coming: « Pete a l'impression de serrer des algues sèches au lieu de la sirène de la nuit, sortie des gouffres de

l'enchantement» (156). As the Tower comments sardonically about Kelly's hypocrisy, « Le saut dans le lit de Kelly était une aventure d'amour en dents de scie » (236), while Twylla is « sa libératrice d'antan et d'aujourd'hui; moi aussi [adds the Tower] ». Kelly, with her sexual coldness and manipulativeness, is, in fact, all too representative of "traditional" Canada, whose long winter covering of snow makes her distinctly resemble a whited sepulchre, this country of non-belligerence and neutrality, with its « réputation de blancheur immaculée » (50). In front of the Henry Moore statue in Nathan Phillips Square, Pete himself is moved to become an oral talespinner, when inhabited by the Moose-Spirit: « *J'ai fait l'amour à deux femmes aussi différentes que le soleil et la lune* » (233). Twylla, the moon spirit (or goddess?) is his own true love, which he recognizes too late, for she has found her soulmate Zinal.

Twylla reads mystic blue and turquoise *stones*, echoing her husband's first name, as well as her own last name (233-34), and Moki, their son, appears in Pete's vision carrying an emerald stone, « *transformée en pierre de clarté* » (235; emphasis mine). The family reenacts the Indian circle of life: « *Je me dirige vers l'est, je trace un cercle par terre, et je place les sept pierres du nord à l'est, puis du nord à l'ouest, trois de chaque côté* » (235). The Tower, herself a stone construction, also turns 360 degrees in one hour. The Moose-Spirit (« Esprit-Original » in French) is also the « Esprit-Originel », a return to origins. The Amerindians and recent immigrants empathize in their faith, as in so many other ways: « *Nous, Amérindiens et immigrants récents, nous en faisons notre foi qui est ancrée au Créant* » (235).

Except for his vision at the end, Pete virtually disappears from the text after his heroic/foolhardy leap. He is mired in an ill-fated affair with Kelly, which is described as « un nœud de vipères » (55) – another literary reference, this time to François Mauriac. Kelly is perhaps the least successfully realized character in the novel, as she is somewhat stereotypical. She has an Electra complex, but has been unable to express her love to her father. Her mother dies thirsting for love, and Bouraoui describes the « Froideur d'un père qui porte un masque voilant toutes les douleurs » (46). She is "tolerant" of Marcel-Marie's homosexuality – « L'homosexualité ne la gêne pas » – which she understands not as an active sex drive, but as « un besoin intérieur de s'enfermer en soi », a need she herself feels. In a nice phrase, we are told she is « murée en elle-même comme une citrouille autour de ses graines, elle ne peut exprimer ses sentiments à personne » (75). Not surprisingly, the one confidante she finds is another woman, Suzy

McNally, with whom she has a lesbian affair, but the sexuality is subordinate to the repressions of both women. Somehow it is hard to believe that she would have the sensitivity to quote William Blake: "To see the world in a grain of sand/And heaven in a wild flower" (102).

Twylla Blue: « L'Esprit-Original » and the Spirit of the Tower

Twylla Blue is the true heroine of the novel, as opposite to Kelly as the moon is to the sun. In most mythologies, the sun is masculine (Apollo), while a female principle presides over the moon (Diana). Twylla introduces Pete to Protestantism in Saint Paul's Chapel at Brantford: « Dans cette chapelle Mohawk, bâtie en 1785, son épouse Twylla Blue, protestante, l'avait amené pour qu'il lui jure fidélité dans une religion qui n'est pas la sienne » (80). More importantly, however, she embodies the spirit of Amerindian religion, which encompasses all religions in harmony with nature, as in the prayer, « *Et vous, oh Jour/Et vous oh Nuit !/Tous vous me voyez/en unisson avec ce monde* » (80).

Twylla's spiritual ancestor is the famous Mohawk poet, Emily Pauline Johnson: « Cette fille célèbre du Chef Mohawk, née à *Chiefwood*, a voyagé à travers le monde, comme poète et actrice, pour expliquer le tort que les Blancs ont infligé à son peuple. Elle a entrepris sa mission avec une passion et un zèle jamais égalés jusqu'à présent » (81). Twylla, like Pauline Johnson, adventures to other worlds, as far as the Menara Tower in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where she encounters Zinal, who will become the love of her life. Zinal seeks refugee status because he has aided his mother, as she had wanted, to die mercifully. Twylla and Zinal strongly resemble two characters in the earlier *Retour à Thyna*, Zitouna who tries to liberate herself in order to liberate other women, and the shy journalist Mansour, whom she chooses for an egalitarian marriage. While Pete leaves Twylla, with their child Moki, on the reserve with its hospitable motto, « Venez vous joindre à nous ! », she not only follows him to the city, but repeats, and extends, Pauline Johnson's world travels.

The Tower cannot save the marriage, any more than she can save Pete's job: « Trait d'union entre ciel et terre, je n'ai pu reconcilier Pete et Twylla » (123). She is neither omniscient nor omnipotent. But she presents Twylla as a true heroine, who is faithful to Pete « malgré la tradition qui lui donne tant de liberté » (123). Like Zitouna, Twylla is both modest and a life force. The Tower compares her to a powerful sea (whose tides are controlled by

the moon): « Si elle s'efface par modestie, c'est qu'elle s'affirme pour rendre à la vie toute sa saveur. Twylla possède le charme et l'art de vous attirer à elle comme la mer aux fleuves vagabonds » (123). She has no need of technology (unlike Kelly) to find her way in Toronto: « Internet sans ordinateur ! » (125). As the Tower seeks to find her identity through language, Twylla finds her vocation as a journalist (like Mansour), going to Rocco Cacciapuoti to seek a position. Twylla thinks, evoking a central image of *La Pharaone*, the female Pharaoh being another powerful woman, Hatchepsut: « Il faut s'adresser au sommet de la pyramide, si on veut la grimper. Jamais aux intermédiaires, ni à la base » (126). The Tower herself is also a kind of elongated pyramid. She realizes that Twylla, like herself, is in quest of language: she is going to « partir à la conquête du nouveau langage des tours pour faire trôner ma réputation auprès des grandes audiences du monde entier » (126).

If Twylla Blue espouses the cause of the Tower, the converse is also true – the Tower finds a kindred soul in Twylla, a kind of sisterhood: « Toutes les deux, nous serons constamment l'une en face de l'autre, même si elle côtoie la Mer de Chine du Sud et moi, le bord du Lac Ontario » (129). In Malaysia, Twylla proves to be typically Canadian in aiding Zinal to emigrate to Canada: « Comme tant de bons Canadiens, elle pense aider le autres avant les siens ! » (142). By the same token, Twylla finds her mate in Zinal, whose name means literally « le Beau », the Handsome One. They even look alike, « ce couple à la peau brune, aux yeux bridés, au visage eurasien... » (140). Malaysia, like Canada (Toronto in particular), like Tunisia, is a crossroads of cultures, a « plaque tournante ». The Kuala Lumpur Tower is a “Menara” or “Menora”: « Le premier mot en arabe veut dire phare, le deuxième en hébreu, bougeoir à sept branches. Celle du milieu sert à allumer les trois de chaque côté » (145). But what matters is that both words, for both cultures and religions, signify light. Zinal offers Twylla balm for her wound, the same gift Zitouna, whose name signifies olive, including olive oil – used for healing, light, and food – offers Mansour.

On her return to Toronto, Twylla has a dream in which her own voice and that of the CN Tower seem to mingle, merge: « *Je ne suis ni rétrograde, ni un Zarathoustra qui persiste à vouloir enseigner le surhumain. Je n'ai de leçon à donner à personne* » (147). Twylla does not want to be the Nietzschean superman (or superwoman), evoked by Pete in his leap from the Tower, but rather to substitute the Moose-Spirit, « l'Esprit-Original », for the superhuman. And the « Esprit-Original » is the spirit of a natural language stretched to its

limits, not of a supernatural. The Tower comments on Twylla's "sisterhood", which gives the latter « la parole rocaïlle » and lifts her burden as a mute witness (147).

At the May Pow-wow at Sky Dome, Twylla falls into a trance and uses her prophetic voice to see the past clearly and foresee the future. Different in appearance, at birth, from the other members of the tribe, they named her "Twylla" because she had "blue-grey eyes" (169), and seems therefore of mixed heritage like her husband Pete. As a baby, she sleeps and eats "like a stone", again a prophecy of her marriage to Pierre Delune. Her eyes are turquoise, a magical color to the Amerindians since it represents both sea and sky, like the turquoise stones: « *Ces pierres à la forme brute sont de grosses pépites turquoises ramassées de la Terre Mère ... à un moment donné une de ces générations saurait s'en servir pour aider la tribu* » (173). Twylla is thus linked to the Magna Mater, Earth Mother.

Twylla also expresses herself in writing, drafting a report to Rocco Cacciapuoti, this « petit Napoléon ». She pays the Tower the tremendous compliment of seeing its disinterestedness in the midst of the Big Banks (175). As the Tower herself has said, « ... les gratte-ciel ... ont l'air de faire des courbettes à mes pieds » (38). Twylla notes, however, that the Kuala Lumpur Tower is metaphysical as well as physical, incorporating « arabesque » forms, as the Koran dictates, which do not spring out of nature, and offering every visitor a "SALAMAT DATANG", or « *Salut de la Paix* » (177):

Leur Tour possède donc un vernis mystique puisque The whole tower head is clad in glass ... arranged in the traditional islamic form of the « MUQARNAS ». Toute la structure devient alors une entité harmonieuse reflétant la renaissance de l'héritage architectural islamique. La Tour de Kuala Lumpur est dotée d'un Esprit que, malheureusement, la nôtre ne possède pas, et ne semble pas vouloir posséder. (177)

These designs are reminiscent of the ancient mosaics in *Retour à Thyna*. The CN Tower is not yet ready to receive the Moose-Spirit: « *Personnellement, je sens l'Esprit-Original rôder autour de la tour au lieu d'en émaner, comme des prières de cœurs incrédules* » (178).

Twylla's Asian experiences have enabled her to transcend her unhappiness at Pete's infidelity: « ... *je ne compte pas arracher Pete aux griffes de Kelly* » (175). She sues him for divorce only to support their son Moki, and she even retains a grain of sympathy for the naïve, victimized Pete, who has allowed himself to be coopted by the system, represented by Kelly: Pete is

a fly caught in Kelly's spider-web (or Venus flytrap?), and, moreover, she does not help him find work or insurance, keeping him dependent on her like a pet dog.

The animal imagery springing up in Twylla's thought-processes is far from the totemic powers associated with the moose and other animals sacred to the Indians; it evokes, rather, animal appetites. If the Tower is a giant totem pole, the animal imagery is also cross-cultural, for the tale is told « à la manière de La Fontaine avec ses animaux » (99).

Twylla appeals to Rocco's somewhat similar Mediterranean « indulgence » to give her free-lance work as a journalist. She shows her sense of humor, as well as her awareness of what the First Nations and the newest immigrants have in common: « *Cela me permettra de mettre un peu de graisse de caribou dans mes spaghettis* » (178). Rocco is far less willing than Twylla, however, to acknowledge the attractions of the CN Tower, since he remains firmly rooted in his native soil – in fact, can't wait to return to it. He asks why

... la verticalité de la Tour CN me laisse froid comme un stalagmite en mal de pesanteur ? Œuvre gigantesque à l'époque, cette tour de ma terre natale est aujourd'hui une naine qui n'atteint même pas un dixième de la Tour CN.

...

Debout et rectiligne notre Tour CN provoque le monde par sa rectitude. Et je comprends mieux maintenant l'intention de Twylla d'insuffler à cette farouche partisane de laïcité l'esprit-original ! Elle ne penche pas comme la tour de Pise. (221)

In Tour 16 Bouraoui (the Tower?) describes Twylla's magical encounter with the Esprit-Original. "Hunting", like a modern Diana, armed only with a camera in the northern Ontario woods, « elle cherche à saisir l'instinct divin et immortalise l'original » (211). Encountering him standing in the water, Twylla focuses and snaps her picture: « L'original pose, laisse montrer ses atours et lui jette un regard admiratif. Elle a osé l'affronter » (212). Her admiration, and Bouraoui's/the Tower's are evoked by the multiplicity of this symbol, representing a nation of multiplicity. Thus, it embodies all the natural colors of Ontario, as well as a number of different animals representative of different cultures making up the Canadian mosaic:

Est-il de la famille du daim avec ses bois aplatis ? De celle du chameau avec sa bosse sur le dos ? De celle du cerf avec ses pattes fines ? De celle du cheval avec son muflle dilaté et élégant ?... Mais ce qui l'étonne

le plus, c'est que son poil est mêlé de gris, de brun, de rouge et de noir
... de tonalités qui s'harmonisent avec la couleur du terroir ! (212)⁸

Twylla (and the Tower) admire most of all the fact that the moose, like Canada itself, is « maître de sa destinée : Contrairement au cerf qui s'affole et suit le cours du troupeau, l'original suit sa nudité virtuose » (212). The moose also appeared traditionally on the Canadian quarter, like the loon on the dollar. But Twylla, like the Tower, rises above material concerns, in favor of the love of the land. The Tower describes Twylla's experience in the northern woods as a « Digne rencontre de la fille de la Première Nation avec l'animal qui l'accueille dans son sein. Maîtrisé. Cette symbiose retenue est devenue rituel de recueillement » (213).

It is Twylla who introduces this Esprit-Original to the Tower, giving the latter equal spiritual status to the Menara Tower in Kuala Lumpur:

Twylla dont le visage de pleine lune⁹ trahit maintenant une joie fulgurante, emporte l'original, à bras le corps, en mon sein... Sans tarder, l'animal se marie à ma chair de pierre, et fait de moi une ville *prévoyante* et non « flamboyante » comme d'autres Capitales. (213)

In effect, the *masculine* Esprit-Original impregnates the female Tower of stone, turning stone into living flesh like a Pygmalion animating his statue of Galatea. From this point on the Tower seems increasingly to think of the characters passing through her as her children, her offspring. Thus the maternal Twylla transforms the Tower into a symbol of maternity. It is the Tower who, « grâce à Twylla », explores the meanings of the Esprit-Original, and ties them to her discovery of a language that accommodates all cultures and religions:

... j'ai appris à lire l'esprit-original qui, se situant dans l'entre-langue, prône la séparation entre le temporel et le spirituel au lieu de celle du Québec avec le reste du Canada. Symbiose des religions et des cultes, l'esprit-original s'accommode de différences parce qu'il est tolérance... (217)

⁸ Georges Bélanger describes the « Esprit-Original » as « ... l'esprit rassembleur, aux multiples facettes : elle représente à la fois la force de la terre, la nature, la liberté, l'amour, la pureté, la tolérance, et seul gage de l'avènement d'un monde nouveau... » (32).

⁹ By this association she surmounts symbolically even the Tower itself, as well as reminding us that she has been the wife of Pierre De Lune.

Until this vision the Tower cannot speak truly: « ... il m'est difficile de démonter les êtres, d'exprimer leurs ressorts complexes avec les mots alors que je ne suis qu'une tour de pierres et de ciment... » (156). Is it the Esprit-Original that endows her with the gift of speech?: « Irai-je jusqu'à dire que c'est l'Esprit-Original qui parle à travers moi ? » (160).

Moki: The New Utopia

The third member of the De Lune family, Moki, like Nisir in *La Pharaone*, can be seen as a kind of savior. He brings the seven stones (seven days?) buried in the Tower's innards to his mother. Twylla chooses three, shaped like a bear, representing world leadership, a wolf, representing light and energy, and a tortoise, representing wisdom and the natural order (237-38). Twylla is to make her career as a sculptress of soapstone animals. Twylla dreams again of the « Voyant-voyageur » with pale grey-blue eyes (herself and her son) who appears in each generation (239). The Tower's "trances", even, echo Twylla's (161).

Moki is to repeat his father's exploit, but in the opposite direction; he *climbs* the Tower, like Spiderman, rather than leaping off it, and ascent also implies descent, but no Fall of Man. The Tower describes the circular adventures of De Lune père et fils:

... Il [Moki] palpe la pierre qui pend à son cou et s'aperçoit qu'elle a pris ma propre forme de Tour CN en miniature. L'Élan des Airs souffle en lui l'haleine de l'arc-en-ciel, dilate son corps et son esprit et lui arme les pieds de ventouses. À la stupéfaction de tout le monde, Moki se met à m'escalader. Il grimpe comme une araignée, à mains nues. Comme son père, il veut, en solo, vaincre temps et pesanteur... Perché à l'endroit même d'où son père avait sauté, Moki fut envahi par une extrême sensation de jouissance. Maintenant il sait qu'il peut, à son tour, retourner vers la terre. (272)

« Jouissance » is the word Roland Barthes used to evoke « *Le Plaisir du Texte* », (1972), and we are once again reminded that this is a book about language. Lest we forget, Moki wants to replace the advertisement for "Microsoft Windows 98 Start" by his own banner, « À livre ouvert/Troisième millénaire » (272). The young Moki seeks to « rendre justice à son père qui fut le premier à défier le gouffre du vide » (276). Not only does the flight metaphor associated with both father and son make them clearly analogous to Joyce's version of the Daedalus and Icarus legend, it also

suggests that they are would-be artists. Moki's adventure is a poem: « L'exploit de Moki est un cri flottant dans le bleu du vent qui laissera sur le parchemin du temps l'ancrage d'un poème d'amour filial » (276). The Tower tries hard to tell his story: if language reflects the soul of a people, why can the stones not also « exprimer l'Esprit-Original de ce Moki prédestiné à extirper du Ciel une lumière inédite ? » (277).

From here Moki returns to the tribe and tries to put into practice a Utopian and natural (small-c communistic) ideal. For this, as for his anonymous exploit, he receives no more thanks from Toronto than his father before him. The RCMP investigate him and consider him guilty of “revolutionary ideas”: « Moki est arrêté le jour de mon anniversaire, le 26 juin, pour atteinte à la sécurité de l'État » (281). Moreover, he is jailed without a trial for showing tourists areas of the reservation they were never supposed to see (282). In fact, he tried to keep a certain Mr. Smith, a tourist, from invading his garden, and a disturbance ensued. The police inspector who questions him, himself a recent immigrant from Mauritius, becomes, reluctantly, fascinated by Moki's project, including the teaching of the Indian circle of life, analogous to the 360-degree turn (“revolution” in another of its meanings) of the Tower: « ... nous apprenons à nos enfants à penser le temps comme nos ancêtres, autrement dit : en cercle et non pas en ligne droite. La linéarité occidentale est révolue et nous ne cultivons pas les carottes et les navets en rangs d'oignons, mais en circularité donnant à la ligne droite une flexibilité qui lui permet de se mouvoir sur 360 degrés » (286). He is as hard on the Cartesian notion of creating a universal language as the Tower, and Bouraoui, are on the Cartesian “cogito”, seen earlier in relation to Kelly.

Once released from prison, Moki carries his “revolution” to the Queen City, where his mother now lives with Zinal and sculpts stone: we are reminded of Henry Moore's dictum that the ideal statue pre-exists, embedded in the stone, needing only to be liberated by the sculptor. Twylla urges her son to rebuild our country to match the height of the Tower. Love, the creator, is guided by « l'écume des jours », ¹⁰ lifting the Moose-Spirit to the top of the Tower (288). Twilight prepares the dawn, she says.

The “mothers” seem to be the characters who prepare for the new day: we have not only Twylla and Moki, but Madame Lebreton and Sympho-

¹⁰ This is another literary allusion, to Boris Vian's novel.

rien, whose central concern is language, and the Tower herself. The Tower has more affinities with the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor than with the Empire State Building. The latter has nothing feminine or “female” about it; it is a purely phallic symbol¹¹. The Statue of Liberty, on the other hand, is maternal; it looms protectively, like a Tower, over New York, the financial district in one direction, the open sea in the other. She is pyramidal in shape, like the CN Tower, leading to the peak, the summit, the Torch of Liberty. She is bicultural, presumably bilingual, a gift from the French Government; indeed, a small Statue of Liberty still rests on an island in Paris. Moreover, she can speak; in the words of Emma Lazarus:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to be free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Give, please, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me;
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

Like the CN Tower, one can climb inside her for the view, a “penetration” with sexual implications. And both Lady Liberty and the CN Tower are defenders of the powerless, the new immigrants, but only the Canadian Tower sees herself as equally a defender of the First Nations. Twylla, at the end, leads a delegation of the First Nations supported by the complete spectrum of the masses of recent immigrants who, despite quarrels and misunderstandings, have succeeded in living together in tolerance (334).

Two Female Voices: From « Dialogue de Sourds » to Communion?

Kelly King, however, has nothing of the maternal about her. In fact, when she was very young she abandoned her baby on the church steps, and is now being unfaithful to Pete with her confidante, Suzy McNally, while Pete descends further into alcohol and drugs. At the very end of the novel there is a dialogue established between Twylla and Kelly. Bouraoui does stack the cards, because Twylla mentors Kelly. The latter’s name combines Irish-Celtic (Kelly) with Anglo-Saxon (King). She is at the controls of the Tower, but knows nothing of its working – a little like the white men who think they operate the Paint Factory in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1953),

¹¹ The novel was written and published before the horrific destruction of those other phallic symbols in New York, the twin towers of the World Trade Center.

while it is a black man, Lucius Brockway, who is really in control, in the basement, and who has invented the process producing white paint with black “dope”. Kelly has abandoned herself totally to the « capitalism - régissant », and has slipped up only with Pete (341). She deals in stereotypes about the Indians: that they lack the spirit of enterprise, that they are rooted in magic and mysticism, that they want to transform the Tower into a teepee or igloo (341-2). Twylla paraphrases a French proverb to this representative of “Anglomania”: « Oui, je vous vois venir avec vos grosses Adidas ! » [« avec vos gros sabots » in French, said of French peasants].

Twylla denies adamantly that she is « une passéiste ». Neither is the Tower, a product of the postmodern age, and therefore technologically sophisticated. But the Tower does say that « Le passé ne me hante pas, le présent j’essaie de le résoudre... », but that « L’avenir m’effraie » (136). Moki, too, knows computers, but seeks to humanize them. Twylla warns Kelly to “pay attention”; this is a reference to the final line of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*— “Attention must be paid”, says Linda Loman of her husband Willy, at the same time an accomplice and a victim of the capitalist mentality. Kelly is commanded to pay attention to the saying: “Don’t judge others if you have not walked in their moccasins” (342).

Kelly admits that « nous n’avons pas assez formé d’autochtones en matière d’éducation, gestion ou politique » (341-2), but what she is really describing is a process of assimilation, loss of identity. Kelly allows that the majority culture has pursued material progress at any price, and Twylla cautions that the rampant spirit of enterprise has lost all spirituality, though lip service is paid to it. She knows that one cannot pour new wine into old bottles, and that the world of the future must be created peacefully: “We will not conquer with *iron*, unlike you, but with *stone*”, the stone capturing the cadence of artistic inspiration (343-44). The Indians must surmount their anger, the whites their guilt over persecuting the Indians.

The novel ends in an apocalyptic vision. Twylla sees them « au point de non-retour, à l’avant-dernière heure de l’Apocalypse » (344). She foresees the restructuring of the Province, the country ... and finally the world (342). Salvation, she affirms, will lie in “tour-ne-soling”, turning towards the rising sun like a sunflower (344) – the very movement of the CN Tower, « qui tient à ce que l’on reconnaisse son langage anti-Babel, sa *langue rocaille*, l’intimité du temporel dans l’immortel, l’Esprit-Original » (345; emphasis mine). While it is a return « au primordial... Tournés vers le Levant », it is not the romantic anti-technology pastoralism espoused by, for instance,

Norman Mailer. Rather, it would use technology to create and operate, not McLuhan's "global village", but the « "village-tour", pas la tour d'ivoire des intellectuels aigris qui ne font que macérer dans leur jargon abscons, mais le village qui offre à tous ses habitants des tours de travail, de loisir, de réflexion et d'action ... et entre toutes une tour culturelle pour délier la langue des précédentes » (345-46). Above all, there is language, and a natural language. Twylla stresses that « la nature, les animaux, les choses nous parlent mieux avec leur silence que les êtres qui vocifèrent leur savoir aux quatre coins de la planète... » (347). The word « silence » foreshadows the very end of the novel.

After this dialogue – no longer a *dialogue de sourds* – the Tower returns to frame the tale: « C'est un *scoop* pour moi, Tour CN, d'avoir capté et transcrit ce dialogue des profondeurs, le premier dans son genre. Les deux femmes ont parlé, ensemble, à cœur ouvert ... elle me comble de satisfaction parce qu'elle émerge de la pierre ! » (347). It is Twylla's love that enables the Tower to give birth to words: « J'ai accompli ce tour d'écorce verbale à la manière des bras de Twylla qui m'ont enlacé un jour. Non pas pour communiquer des informations sur ondes ou sur écrans, mais pour me transmettre son amour » (349).

The Immigrants: An "Anacharsis Klotz Deputation"

If it were not for these "privileged moments" of communion, Toronto, as well as the "global village", would remain an Eliot-esque "Waste Land", with the crowds emerging from the CN Tower and the Sky Dome resembling those crossing London Bridge, experiencing a death-in-life:

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many,
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. (I: 60-65)

Rocco: The Mediterranean

Of the three recent immigrants who stand out in the text, only one tries to embrace the capitalistic system, despite his own nature: Rocco Cacciapuoti, whose last name means "a seeker after power", and whose first name refers

again to “rock” or stone. This “piccolo Napoleone” came to Canada seeking his own personal Eldorado, but adding to the mix his “Mediterranean blood giving zest to life” (104). The descendant of generations of masons, he becomes, ironically, an MP and Minister of Communications in a language he scarcely knows! Not to worry, he has succeeded a Ukrainian who, in turn, has succeeded a Pole. We are warned that he is tricky rather than genial, and he only “helps” Twylla in order to rid himself of her. His appointment results from a Liberal government’s patronage, but he must move to the right if he has any hope of keeping his post: « *Mais le pouvoir me ligote et je ne peux rien décider par moi-même dans ce pays de liberté et de démocratie* » (222). An arriviste / opportunist, he does indeed lose his position in the Liberal caucus when he votes against the GST (231). He has already betrayed Pete by not pleading his cause, and compares himself to the traitor Count Ugolino della Gherardesa in Dante’s *Inferno* (222).

The Tower comments that « Rocco n’a réussi dans le nouveau monde que parce qu’il porte en lui le monde ancien » (219). He constantly compares the Toronto cityscape to his native Italy: « Rien de la sorte autour de moi » (219). As the Tower remarks, the whole world swims in a sea of illusion, and the greatest illusion is that of Uniqueness (220). But at least Rocco assists the Tower to keep her illusions by sending Twylla to Malaysia. However, he doesn’t even read her report, as he fails to intervene on Symphorien’s behalf. The Tower privileges us to overhear a long soliloquy/monologue from Rocco, as from many of the other characters. He is at home in ambiguity, and only intervenes for others when there is something in it for himself. As an outsider, he recognizes that he will never be inside (« de souche »): « ... vous n’êtes plus Italien et vous ne serez jamais Canadien » in this “paradise” of « *souches élues* », the elect (226). He hears the majority culture telling him, « ... nous sommes contre vous et nous n’aurons jamais confiance en vous » (227). If he has cultivated the English language, it is because « *La première langue officielle ... est un peu moins chauvine que la deuxième* » (226). He licks his wounds like the she-wolf that nourished Romulus and Remus – another mother-image.

Rocco sees all his countrymen as « des Canadiens errants ». He uses the metaphor of writing, on a blank page, to suggest the country’s racism: « *La page blanche doit “parler blanc”, mais on n’a jamais su que le blanc a plusieurs teintes ! Qui sait que le blanc pur n’est qu’hérésie ?* » (226). In fact white, as Herman Melville points out in “The Whiteness of the Whale” in *Moby Dick* (1851), has all the colors of the rainbow, and can be terrifying: it is “the colorless

all-color of atheism”. Rocco’s status gives him a certain lucidity and clairvoyance as to Marc Durocher and the dream of Québec separation. Of the slogan, « *Un Québec souverain n’abandonnera pas les minorités francophones au Canada* », Rocco can only comment wryly, “Who are they kidding?” (225).

The Tower comments on Rocco’s soliloquy, « *sa propre autobiographie* », admitting that this is not a subgenre she admires. But at least she is democratic: “They can’t say that I don’t allow my characters to express themselves” (231). She describes each character as an individual tower: « *Tous mes personnages sont donc des parties de moi-même. Mais comme ils ont du caractère, ils deviennent autonomes. Chacun est une tour à son image* » (244). But once created, they take on a life of their own, cut the umbilical cord: “There’s nothing I can do”. She claims she invented nothing. The characters « *existent bel et bien et travaillent dans mon sein. Je les vois entrer et sortir en moi* » (243).

Souleyman and Symphorien: Wise Man and “Holy Fool”

Two more appealing recent immigrants, from the Tower’s point of view, are Souleyman Mokoko, from Africa, and Symphorien Lebreton, from metropolitan France.

Souleyman Mokoko, whom we meet first, is a black immigrant who climbs and descends the Tower, like Pete the Mohawk, but from the inside. He becomes its elevator operator, even though, as an “Engineer of bridges and roads”, he is vastly overqualified (28). This is his first encounter with the subtle forms of Canadian racism – so subtle that Canadians themselves are often unaware of it: « *... il s’est trouvé monnaie non convertible dans ce pays d’accueil qui se targue d’être un des plus hospitaliers de l’Occident* » (28). As a political refugee, he is ready, unlike Rocco Cacciapuoti, to embrace Canada wholeheartedly, and has no wish to return to the mother country. Souleyman and Pete, both colonized, but in different ways, become fast friends.

As his first name indicates, Souleyman has the wisdom of Solomon. Is he also the Nietzschean Superman, *sur-homme*, evoked, very differently, by Toni Morrison in her *Song of Solomon* (1977)? It also ties him to the unwise Pete, who nonetheless plays both Nietzschean and comic strip Superman in his leap from the Tower.

Souleyman speaks better French than Marcel-Marie Duboucher, who “butchers” the language (« *bouche* » also signifies “mouth”). The Tower

thinks amusedly, comparing Souleyman to Marcel-Marie, French colonization succeeded better in Africa than in Canada. When the gay Marcel-Marie tries to seduce a Toronto French School student, the student and his teacher, to our great amusement, are more offended by the poor quality of his French than by his indecent approaches (53). Souleyman, on the other hand, is not only fluent in French, but « parfaitement bilingue » (54). This gift does not help him to secure steady employment in Canada; both he and Pete have no recourse but CUPE, a labor union determined mainly to protect the rules of seniority (54-55).

Like many immigrants of his race, whatever their nationality, he is relegated to the Jane-Finch corridor of North York (118). He loses his job, menial as it is, through no fault of his own. Leaving Jane-Finch for work, he loses control of his car on a sheet of black ice, creating a typical Toronto five-vehicle chain collision, which Bouraoui describes humorously in sexual terms: « Accident où la ferraille prend sa revanche dans une entre-pénétration jouissive » (181). Typically, too, Souleyman is blamed because of a series of stereotypes: « les Africains ne possèdent aucune notion du temps... Ils fabriquent des enfants qu'ils confient à la rue pour les élever... » (184). A Dr. Ronchon is quoted authoritatively: « *le cyperdépendant* – et tous ces Africains sont des cyperdépendants ! – *doit être traité comme l'alcoolique ou le toxicomane* » (184). Ironically, after his auto accident, Souleyman's next job is as a taxi driver, ferrying passengers to the CN Tower. The Tower's love of her characters is clear with Souleyman: « C'est vrai Souleyman ne me laisse pas indifférente » (183).

Souleyman's last name, Mokoko, sounds suspiciously like "Moki", Pete's and Twylla's son. In fact, Moki, from the north woods, teaches this man of the Sudan how to survive in Canada, snow-covered the better part of the year: « C'est le fils de Twylla, Moki, qui viendra le secourir et lui apprendre à vivre dans cet Igloo » (184).

If mothers and sons play significant roles in the narrative, so do at least one father and daughter (apart from Kelly and her father). Souleyman has a fifteen-year-old daughter, Amanicha, who, in fact, raises the questions of African and Egyptian history. The Egyptian references occur as early as Tour 3 when the Tower says, « ... toutes les collectivités se ressemblent depuis les Pharaons jusqu'à l'univers éclaté de cette fin de siècle » (36). Amanicha asks her father « pourquoi cette pyramide se termine-t-elle par une tête d'aiguille qui porte un turban ? » (185) – thus evoking the Egyptian pyramids of *La Pharaone*. If *La Pharaone* refers to Queen Hatchepsut,

Souleyman has had the idea of naming his daughter Amanicha for « la Reine Amanichakhéto » in their ancestral rich, powerful Kingdom of Koush (the Biblical Cush), which also expressed its worship in the mystic form of pyramids. Indeed, Souleyman admits that « ... la Tour est une pyramide en aiguille ... l'Aiguille rocheuse servait de symbole religieux pour les Pharaons » (186). The reference is to Cleopatra's Needle, also appropriated by Napoleon's armies. The Needle reminded Egyptians of both the eternal and the temporal, of immortality and mortality, of belief in God as well as temporality. It indicated origins, was fixed and immutable, while the CN Tower is a site of passage. But the Tower will establish her own claim to immortality: the "needle" is also the Tower's stem, or « tige », which she puns on, referring to her « vertige » and « prestige »: « Mon pouvoir donne le *vertige* et parfois le *prestige* » (119; emphasis mine). Thus, Pyramid and Tower seem both to become Jungian archetypes, part of some collective unconscious. Souleyman reminds his daughter that the CN Tower « n'est pas la même pyramide que celle dont je t'ai parlé. Et ce n'est pas un turban, c'est un cycle parfait » – like the Indian circle of life (185). Nonetheless, the Tower remains a kind of Rorschach test for the viewer, who sees it through the prism of his own culture. And the Tower herself is longing for some transcendent meaning, spirituality, « anti-Babel ».

Souleyman is not only a wise man, but a talespinner to his daughter, who asks him to tell her about their ancestral pyramids. What he recounts is the circularity of races and cultures, like those of individual men and women. The ancient Kingdom of Koush (Nubia, roughly corresponding to the modern Sudan), conquered Egypt: « Ses dynasties de Pharaons noirs venaient du Sud » (186). Now the former colonizer has become the colonized: « Nous avons été des conquérants et, à notre tour, nous avons été conquis » (186). Souleyman thus retraces and re-vises history, reminding his daughter of the former glories of black African civilization: from Djebel Barkal, "the Sacred Mountain", still today flanked by a rocky needle resembling this Tower, the Nubian princes of his people left to conquer Egypt. Souleyman's ancestors came from the Kingdom, now known as the Sudan, spread over the confluence of the White Nile, the Blue Nile and the Atbara. Dynasties of black Pharaohs came from the South. In the beginning (about 2500 B.C.), it was the independent kingdom Kerma – perhaps the most ancient in Africa (186). Moreover, according to one theory, the ancient Egyptians themselves may have been black. It is Souleyman, as well, who has a vision of a "Tour Multi-Cult" (247).

The CN Tower is flattered by all this attention. As Twylla imparts love and the Esprit-Original to her, Souleyman gives her history and another ancient mysticism: « ... il me plaît en effet de me voir, parmi les pyramides, une très haute pyramide » (189). Mystics have long believed in the magical powers of the pyramidal shape. And she values the fact that our Canadian “huddled masses” come to her to confide, as American immigrants, and their children, turn to the Statue of Liberty: « Il n’aurait jamais pu ouvrir son cœur de la sorte à un Canadien pelure de laine ou pureté de chevreau ! » (188). She is delighted to be compared to « l’aiguille rocheuse » or the « ventre de la pierre » Souleyman describes: « Du coup, je me suis vue installée dans une tradition millénaire. Grâce à cet étranger, devenu Canadien, qui ne trahit pas sa mémoire ! » (188).

Souleyman, now the proverbial Ph.D. driving a cab, holds no grudge against the Tower; to the contrary: « La Tour ne me trahit pas, mais ses *managers*. Eux ne l’emporteront pas au paradis ! » (188). Rather, he blames “the system”: Kelly herself is but a cog in the wheel: « On ne peut rien y changer, même pas la graisse qui lubrifie *la machine infernale* » (190; emphasis mine), the last reference a nice bit of intertextuality, demonstrating Souleyman’s familiarity with Jean Cocteau. If he no longer ascends and descends the Tower, Souleyman now constantly deposits visitors at her feet. And he wants to protect her: « ... j’ai créé une amulette *Tour-aiguille-Ventre-pierre* pour éloigner le mauvais œil de ma Tour CN » (191). The *khamisa* of *Bangkok Blues* serves the same purpose. Souleyman refers to his « tigritude rythmale », as to « Négritude », but also « tige » and, of course, « tigre ». He wants, above all, to give the Tower “a soul” (191). Some see him as an African magician or sorcerer, and Bouraoui has him comment self-reflexively (on Bouraoui’s own text, *La Rose des sables*): « Car dans le désert qui ne rejette personne, fleurissent et survivent, pour toujours, les plus belles roses de sable » (191).

Souleyman quotes Mohammed: « Une pierre est descendue du ciel plus blanche que le lait, mais les péchés des hommes l’ont noircie », a parable Souleyman applies to the CN Tower (191; emphasis mine). The Tower in turn recognizes that he had used his black hands in the elevator, to protect the Tower with white magic, a Melvillean play on our preconceptions of black and white, and their supposed associations with evil and good. Souleyman also notes the irony of scheduling the Black Festival, Kuumba, in February, the coldest, nastiest month of the year (190). Despite the view of Toronto as a whited sepulchre, for the most part the Tower recognizes her city as the most

dynamic and cosmopolitan in the world., changed from 1950 (three-quarters of British origin) to today (three-quarters multicultural).

If Souleyman is the wise man, Symphorien Lebreton is the “wise fool” or “holy fool”, speaking truth in nonsense. His first name suggests a symphony which is worth nothing, or comes to nothing – « Symphorien » – and his last name suggests his origins, a Breton from Brittany, the only native-born Frenchman in the narrative. Given his talents, there is also probably an echo of the surrealist André Breton. He is a half-crazed would-be poet, through whom Bouraoui manages to poke some good-natured fun at poets in general, with some self-reflexive irony directed at himself,¹² and at stereotypical audience responses, ranging from total indifference to suspicion to fear and loathing – fear, specifically, that he may be a terrorist who will blow up the Tower, and half of Toronto with it! Is Bouraoui thinking of the Breton movement for independence, and their fight to maintain their own (Celtic) language within France? Or of their historic link to Celtic Britain and Cornwall, bagpipes and all, associating them with both of the Founding Nations of Canada?

The Tower sees herself as Symphorien’s mother, opening her arms in an embrace – no wonder, when we meet his formidable biological parent, Madame Lebreton, with her aggressive epistolary style! And Symphorien reciprocates that love: « *Je t’aime Tour comme l’amour qui tourne au vinaigre. Pas comme cet Africain débarqué de la lune* » (199). But he also sees her in sexual terms: « *Dans tes entrailles, je me masturbe avec les mots... J’éjacule en toi mes paroles de pierre pour t’ensemencer de nouvelles lois d’hospitalité* » (200).

Symphorien appears relatively late in the narrative; he is named only on page 112, shortly following the Tower’s perception, at the beginning of Tour 9, of an unknown « Intrus » (109). He is likened to Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, also nameless at the start, who hides in a basement from the racist world of 1940s New York City, and cultivates Emersonian self-reliance to the point of plugging into the Monopolated Power and Light Company (Con Ed?). Trying to be invisible, however, Symphorien “sticks out like a sore thumb” (112). He is a black squirrel hiding his peanut, not in a tree trunk, but in the Tower’s stairwell. His “peanuts” are *billets-doux*, the equivalent of Melville’s Bartleby the Scrivener’s “dead letters” (1856),

¹² Bouraoui has admitted in an interview that there may be an echo of himself, « mais peu importe ! »

or, more conspicuously, of Dr. Reefy's "paper pills", words of insight scribbled and crumpled in his pockets, in Sherwood Anderson's short story of the same name in *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919). The Tower is somewhat ambivalent about him. Sometimes he alarms her, but for the most part she realizes he has no bad intentions: « Il croit nourrir ainsi ma base, me gaver de ses mots-talismans, de ses bulles cérébrales... Mouvements intuitifs sans parole, sans musique, sans lumière » (112). He dreams of his words being carried throughout the world « dans les musées de l'imaginaire »¹³. The Tower (Bouraoui) then self-reflexively, and very humorously, notes, « Dès lors, il sera le lauréat du Prix Trillium » (112)¹⁴. We are reminded of Kateb, in *Retour à Thyna*, who hangs his "paper pills", in the form of poems, on the ficus trees along the boulevard.

The Tower and Symphorien are "in synch": « ... je me demande si mes vibrations n'ont pas déclenché son séisme ? » They play a cat-and-mouse game, and for the time being the Tower thinks that « Symphorien tient à démanteler le système que j'ai mis en place » (113). As the Tower says, however, "Nobody can fight City Hall" (113). She then humorously lists all the eccentrics who have tried to master her:

Il est vrai que je suis un aimant puissant qui attire les excentriques de tout poil. Des gens streaked down les 2570 marches de mes escaliers. Nus comme des vers luisants, dégringolant sexes à l'endroit et à l'envers. Certains se sont délibérément foulé la cheville ou cassé le pied pour des retours d'assurances assurés. Certains ont escaladé les marches en motos, avec des pogo sticks, charriant des pianos, des réfrigérateurs ou démontant une Jeep Suzuki. Tant d'autres exemples que je ne saurais mentionner. Par prudence et par objectivité. Notons, cependant, que Brendan Keenoy accomplit la montée la plus rapide – un record – en sept minutes cinquante-deux secondes, en 1989. On s'est jeté du Skypod avec ou sans câble. Remonté en araignée sur les fenêtres en verre à l'extérieur. Tout cela pour dire que chaque fois qu'il existe un record à établir, l'on va se précipiter pour l'annuler et prendre la place du premier.
(114)

Symphorien makes the Tower his nest, or home, made completely of paper: « Au milieu de ses meubles en papier, ses bibelots en papier, ses coussins en

¹³ The « imaginaire » is Gilbert Durand's term for an interdisciplinary criticism examining the creative process.

¹⁴ Pierre Léon's article, entitled « Avec un finaliste du prix Trillium, la Tour CN perd la tête », noting that this novel was indeed a Trillium Award finalist, concludes, « Un beau texte sur un pays en devenir. À lire en attendant...le Prix ? » (8).

papier, jusqu'à ses serviettes de toilettes et ses mouchoirs de papier ... il a l'air d'être lui-même une armature où la graphie justifie son existence, donne corps à ce décor fait maison » (117). His words are those of a man flayed alive, of an omniscient author addressing only himself. He utters equally words of hate and love, but there is no internal coherence: « On peut suivre les méandres de son écriture de chat cauteleux sans trouver leur cohérence, même s'ils biberonnent un chaos de sens capable de démanteler ma propre silhouette » (117).

Nonetheless, in the final analysis, the Tower appreciates Symphorien's contributions to her narrative: « ... je sens son désir ouater les traces de ma voix dans ce récit... » (117). She wonders still if he is planning to blow her up, « tirer sur la gâchette afin de bloquer le flux de mes images et me réduire au désespoir, au silence infini... » (118), an echo of Pascal's « Le silence infini de ces espaces éternels m'effraie ». Instead of "Thus Spoke Zarathustra", the Tower might be "speaking" Pascal.

She comes to realize, however, that Symphorien « m'est fidèle jusqu'à la nuque » (200). He seems a symphony conductor, or a musician, ranging from Pavarotti to Duke Ellington to the Platters: "Only you can make me believe..." (202-03). He even evokes Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture: « Puis les deux mains de Symphorien marquent le silence, et dans un déchirement soudain qui fait secouer mes parois en verre, explose la colère des batteries, la violence éjaculatoire des cymbales. La foudre tombe du ciel » (201). At times he howls like a Northern wolf (203); at others he is Romeo, Mac the Knife, and Torero (204). Symphorien embodies some contradictions of the Canadian immigrant: « Volcan aux rares éruptions, Symphorien est un chaos de glace et de feu dont l'unique dessin est un « dur désir de durer » (202; emphasis mine). By now the Tower is shielding and protecting him. She recognizes that he is nothing like the "nut" who attacked tourists in the Empire State Building (204). But the Empire State Building couldn't tape what happened; the CN Tower is capable of registering everything: « ... mon antenne, à moi, est plus vigilante, probablement parce que je suis de nature plus réceptive » (205). She knows, however, that Symphorien is « bénin à la racine », and is only suffering from solitude – the Third Solitude of the recent immigrant. At the very end, she admits, « Je reviens à Symphorien parce que j'éprouve une certaine sympathie pour ce Français perdu. Je le dis sans ambage » (313).

The Francophones « de Souche »

Despite his recurrent obsessions which land him in mental institutions, and his *idée fixe* to carve out the owner's heart and brains (her machinery and stairwell), and create an Eiffel Tower in her place – as his mother lectures the Tower on classical French grammar – it isn't his - Cartesianism that succeeds in planting a bomb. Rather, an explosion is caused by the two idiots *de souche*, Marc Durocher and Marcel-Marie Duboucher, whom it is difficult to tell apart (like any two of the Three Stooges), and who seem to disappear from the latter part of the text until their attempted coup. At the end Symphorien is merely facing east – the Eiffel Tower – in a position of worship (249). As Bouraoui notes, Madame Lebreton says, « Il ne faut pas malmener ma langue », which is ironic since the Tower is capable of assimilating and disseminating *all* languages, because love masters all languages. Thus, the Tower has sympathy for the alienation of the Lebretons, but she transcends their French chauvinism.

The Tower: A Female Quest

Marc and Marcel-Marie, on the other hand, as alike as two peas in a pod, do not particularly interest Bouraoui – or the Tower – probably because they are too local, particularized. At the very end the Tower summarizes the various quests of the different characters:

Je vois Rocco repartir en quête de son particularisme méditerranéen, Kelly de son lesbianisme souterrain et de son anglomanie englobante, Marc de son séparatisme décadent, Marcel-Marie de sa souchitude rampante, Souleyman de sa tigritude reconciliante et Symphorien de sa scribouillerie qui se love à l'intérieur. (329)

But the Tower herself has been on a quest. This notion may seem a contradiction in terms, since she is rooted in concrete and cannot move in a linear direction. But her quest is circular, turning a full 360 degrees in an hour, and is parallel to the circular quest of the Amerindian Twylla, and the Malaysian Zinal (or the quest of Mansour and Zitouna through octopus-shaped Thyna). Perhaps the quest needs to be redefined in non-Occidental terms. It is an Amerindian-Oriental-female quest. Indeed, the Tower fulfills a spiritual quest through Twylla and

the Esprit-Original, Zinal and the Menara Tower, Souleyman and the pyramids.

Thus the novel goes well beyond Margaret Atwood's survival motif – « car survivre est la quête canadienne par excellence » – to a Faulknerian certainty that “man [woman] will not only endure; [s]he will prevail”.¹⁵

The Tower takes us into her confidence as narrator: « ... je me demande comment je vais terminer mon histoire ? » (329), which she qualifies as a « récit-roman-journal-prosème » (348). She reminds us that « Des mains autochtones et des mains venues du monde entier m'ont érigée » (314). Her greatest sympathies are clearly for « nous, Africains, Afro-Américains, Antillais, Autochtones ... et autres premières lettres de l'Alphabet » (328). For the most part her characters speak in monologues because solitude is universal: « Les gens sont cloîtrés dans une tragique solitude » (347), and this is a state she wants to transcend by creating a « littérature d'originalité ». She becomes a great mother figure, an umbilical cord for her characters. Now she is going to free them to find their own way: « ... je vais couper le cordon, me fracturer en mots-rocailles... » (349).

Beginning the new millennium, the Tower affirms the connection between herself and speech: « Pierre de souche, Tour de touche, je suis la carte d'identité de la Ville-Reine ». Now twenty-five ears old,¹⁶ « Morte pour l'un, je ressusciterai pour le suivant... Mais existerai-je si mon histoire n'est pas maintenant racontée ? Au fond, qu'est-ce qu'une tour qui n'inspire ni légende ni conte, ni même le courroux des mauvaises langues ? » (291). Zarathustra, too, uttered wisdom from his tremulous stone lips, but, as Bouraoui notes, he “spoke” in the past tense, while the Tower speaks in the present, and looks to the future.

The Tower has found its legend, embodied in this lyric novel which offers a vision of liberty and tolerance, a dream for all people who shelter in this Canada, from the original inhabitants, the Amerindians

¹⁵ In fact, Bouraoui doesn't hesitate to critique the *Survival* thesis humorously: « ... *Survival*, sur laquelle l'écrivaine Margaret Atwood a mis le doigt pour délier tant de bourses... *Souchique* en son âme et conscience, sa parole devient l'essence de notre sagesse et de notre identité » (156-57).

¹⁶ Bouraoui has mentioned that the Tower's existence in Canada is just a little shorter than his own.

and Inuit, to the founding nations, French and British, to the recent immigrants¹⁷. All these are embraced by the spirit of « Originalitude », « une source d'inspiration, un souffle constant de tolérance, une manière d'être laïque et républicaine » (292). After all the verbal fireworks, power, lyricism, studied multilingualism, when and if the vision is fulfilled, the rest is « silence », the last word of the novel ... or the Word Made Stone!¹⁸

¹⁷ The Tower stresses all along the differences between the Canadian treatment of immigrants, the cultural mosaic, and the American, the melting pot: « ... nous n'avons fait bouillir les immigrés dans le *Melting pot* américain pour les niveler au ras des pâquerettes, *the American way of life* » (39). [A first-year Humanities student actually used this phrase to define “melting pot”: “When the immigrants come to America they put them in this big pot and boil them”]. She sees this Canadian policy as a « Ruée vers l'or du temps », incidentally a reference to the name of Bouraoui's Tunisian publisher (39; emphasis mine).

¹⁸ Unfortunately, the Canadian editor omitted the last turn of the Tower, Tour 24, signifying twenty-four hours of turning per diem. It consisted of a blank page, à la Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, indicating the Tower's silence, but inviting the reader to complete the work. The twenty-four Tours are designed to correspond to twenty-four hours in the life of Toronto, analogous to Joyce's *Ulysses*, spanning twenty-four hours in the life of Dublin. Except for that last missing Tour, I can see only one other number that is significant, Tour 13, a mystic number, in which Twylla goes into a trance and has her vision. The Tunisian editor, incidentally, did include the last Tour, but headed it Tour 00 for the year 2000, also missing the point of the blank page and the significance of 24.